

Fact Sheet

Twin Peaks Wild Horse and Burro Herd

Where is the herd and what is special about these animals?

- The Twin Peaks Wild Horses and Burro Herd roams over about 789,852 acres of public and private lands in Lassen County, California, and Washoe County, Nevada. The BLM manages 656,173 acres of the Twin Peaks Herd Management Area (HMA).
- The HMA provides forage and habitat for wild horses and burros as well as wildlife, including the greater sage-grouse, pronghorn, and the East Lassen mule deer herd.
- The HMA also contains many important biological, geological, scenic, recreational, and cultural resources. The other predominant land uses within the HMA are livestock grazing, wilderness recreation, and general recreation, including hunting.
- The Twin Peaks wild horses are descendants of introduced Spanish horses, local ranch horses and cavalry mounts. In the 1860s, 500 Spanish horses were brought up from San Diego. Their descendants were captured and served as mounts in the Boer War, the Spanish-American War, and World Wars I and II. Over the years, local residents improved the herd quality by culling horses with undesirable traits and introducing horses with desirable traits, resulting in today's unique and striking Twin Peaks wild horses.



Twin Peaks Herd Management Area

What needs to be done to maintain this herd?

- To maintain a healthy Twin Peaks herd and to restore or maintain the rangelands in a healthy condition, the BLM plans to gather enough horses and burros to restore the population to a level that can be sustained in balance with the other uses described above.
- Through a land use planning effort in 2008 that included full public involvement, the BLM determined the appropriate management level (AML) to be 448-758 horses and 72-116 burros in the HMA. However, the current population is estimated at 2,300 horses and 200 burros, an overpopulation resulting in ongoing damage to the rangelands.
- Under the 1971 Wild, Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act, when this occurs, BLM is required to "remove excess animals" to "restore a thriving ecological balance to the range."
- BLM plans to gather as many of the total population as possible (2,300 horses and 200 burros), remove an estimated 1,855 excess wild horses and 103 burros, and return to the range an estimated 450 horses and 72 burros in the HMA to achieve ecological balance.

- Of the animals to be returned to the range, mares would receive fertility control vaccine, and more stallions than mares would be returned to slow the growth of the herd.
- The animals removed will be offered for adoption through the BLM's wild horse and burro adoption program, or placed in long-term holding pastures.

Why is the gather necessary?

- Overpopulated wild horse herds overuse the rangeland, threatening their own health and the health of native wildlife and plants, damaging scarce water sources, and reducing water quality.
- Riparian functional assessments (studies of streamside ecosystems) between 2004 and 2009 found overgrazing in riparian habitats, including trampling and trailing damage by wild horses.
- Livestock grazing is also a factor, but BLM actively manages this authorized use to mitigate the impacts, but wild horses and burros roam freely, year-round as the law allows.
- Cultural resource surveys between 2008 and 2009 found the wild horse and burro overpopulation is contributing to trampling damage of cultural resource sites and artifacts.



Damaged Riparian Area

How does BLM balance wild horses, burros with livestock management?

- Overall, livestock use in the HMA has declined by 61 percent over the past 50 years. Currently, under the 2008 plan, BLM authorizes up to 3,700 cattle and 10,000 sheep to use the allotment during specified times throughout the year.
- Forage is allocated by Animal Unit Months or AUMs. An AUM is the amount of forage consumed in a month by an adult horse, a mare and foal, two burros, an adult cow or cow and calf, or five sheep.
- Under the plan, 22,481 AUMs are allocated annually for cattle and 10,000 AUMs for sheep. Wild horses and burros are allocated 5,808 to 9,792 AUMs based on the range of AML numbers.
- Cattle have used about 11,498 AUMs, or 50% of their authorized allocation annually over the last 10 years and sheep have used about 2,940 AUMs or about 30%. Wild horse and burro use has increased annually to 24,228 AUMs in 2009.



Mare and Foal on Twin Peaks HMA